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Impact of Parental Involvement on Literacy Skills in Early Childhood Education

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A Literature Review Presented

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Abstract

What impact does parental involvement have on literacy development in early childhood education? This literature review focuses on parental involvement in early childhood. It focuses on the impact between parental involvement and the success of children on literacy skills. There are also many strategies that have been researched that can help educators get parents involved in their child's education that will increase success for the child in the area of reading. It focuses on the importance of students learning foundational literacy skills at a young age in order to ensure success later on in school. This literature review answers the following questions: What parts of parental involvement are important to literacy development in children? Does the amount of parental involvement and literacy development depend on different factors? Does the connection and communication between the school and parents directly affect parental involvement?

Impact of Parental Involvement on Literacy Skills in Early Childhood Education

The education system in America is constantly changing and more is being expected out of students at a much younger age. The biggest change can be seen in the way kindergarten has changed over the past ten to fifteen years. With half-day programs giving way to full day programs in state to state, the curriculum that was once saved for first grade has been pushed down to five and six year olds. Nearly 98% of students attend kindergarten (Strauss, 2016), which is becoming much more rigorous. Kindergartners now spend hours in their seats doing academic work, with very little breaks, recess, or other activities. These kids are then expected to be able to do things by the time they leave kindergarten that they may not be developmentally prepared to do (Strauss, 2016). After the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) was implemented in 2001, it put more stress on the schools to make sure every student was successful. The success of the students as well as the school was placed on standardized tests. The goal was to get 100% of students to proficiency in both reading and math. This provided much strain on educators and schools as well as the students.

There has been so much pressure placed on young students, especially in the area of literacy. Early literacy skills are known as foundational skills, which are critical for a child to have in order to be proficient in reading throughout their educational career. It has been critically important to determine how educators can best help students learn these early literacy skills, but the involvement of parents is also very important as well. The general picture derived from the research supports the assertion that family involvement leads to better attendance, higher scores on standardized tests, higher motivation to study, lower absenteeism, and improved behavior at home and at school (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). These are just some of the many benefits of having a good school and family connection. Researchers then began to look at the importance of

parental involvement, when it pertains directly to early literacy. Early literacy skills start well before a child enters kindergarten, and this is where parental involvement becomes critically important to ensure that the child does not fall behind before he or she even starts school. In the year 2016 in the United States, 47% of eligible students were not enrolled in preschool. This means that 47% of children are entering kindergarten and have never been in school before. In the past, these students would not be as far behind as they would be now without having exposure to the foundational skills needed before entering kindergarten (Child Trends 2019). This is when parental involvement even before school becomes increasingly important. When parents engage in family literacy with their students, they are setting them up for success when it comes to reading and literacy skills in school.

It is so important to promote the importance of parental involvement in early literacy to the community by sharing this research. Families need to be aware of the importance of developing these skills at a young age. Parents may believe they do not have the knowledge to work with their students on literacy, but they have a wealth of knowledge from their backgrounds and cultures that can benefit their child. This paper not only focuses on the benefits of parental involvement and how it affects the success of the child, but, more importantly, how schools can partner with parents and the community to promote early literacy skills within the home on a regular basis. This ensures that the child has the best opportunity to be successful throughout his or her educational career.

Review of the Literature

Literacy Development in Early Childhood

As more and more are expected out of our students, literacy skills in early childhood are becoming increasingly more important to determine the future educational success of the child.

There has been much research that has been conducted on the importance of early literacy as a determining factor for success of that particular child. Juel reported a 90% chance that a child who was a poor reader at the end of grade one would remain a poor reader at the end of grade four (Crosby, Rasinski, Padik, Yildirim, 2015). More importantly, Hernandez noted that students who are not reading at grade level by grade three are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time than children who are reading proficiently at grade three (Crosby et al., 2015). The following are the foundational literacy skills that are expected out of kindergarten students to ensure that they are ready to enter first grade. Kindergartners must be able to demonstrate the basic understanding of the organization and basic features of print, such as being able to follow print from left to right, recognize that spoken words can be represented with written language, understand words are represented by spaces in print, and recognize all letters of the alphabet. Kindergartners must also be able to demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds. They need to be able to recognize and produce rhyming words, blend segment syllables in spoken words, isolate and pronounce different sounds in a word, and add or substitute sounds in simple words to make new words. They also need to be able to match letter sounds to the written letter and use decoding skills to read unfamiliar words, and be able to read common high frequency words with ease. This is quite a bit for a kindergartner to accomplish, and this begins the foundation of their literacy education. What can be done to ensure that each child is reaching his or her maximum potential for literacy skills in early childhood?

Importance of Literacy Development in Early Childhood

Why is research on parental involvement in early childhood so important? When a child is born, their brain begins to form immediate connections. Ninety percent of children's critical development occurs by age five (Make Way for Books 2019). Emergent literacy skills are skills

that students need to have before they can learn to read. If they are coming into kindergarten lacking these skills, then it is up to the teacher to teach them these early literacy skills before they are even able to read. This then already puts the child behind their peers, and it is harder to get caught up. Eighty-three percent of students who are not reading on grade level by the beginning of fourth grade are at risk of failing to graduate on time (Shrier, 2013), which is why it is important that students come into kindergarten with some early literacy foundational skills. Research indicates that children who are struggling readers in first grade are 88% more likely to be struggling readers in fourth grade. When children struggle to read in fourth grade, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Make Way for Books 2019). Teaching children these early literacy skills can help ensure that all students have the opportunity to blossom in their literacy education.

These early literacy skills begin early on in child development. Children first begin to develop language, both verbal and nonverbal. With this development of language, a child will begin to develop their vocabulary. Children learn vocabulary in many ways, such as reading books and having conversations with adults and other kids. Studies and research has shown that the larger a child's vocabulary, the quicker they will then learn to read (Shrier, 2013). Children will then also develop print awareness. Even though they are not able to read the words on the page, they should be able to hold a book correctly and have an understanding of when the story begins and when it ends. Two other early literacy skills that begin to develop prior to kindergarten are letter recognition and the understanding that each letter of the alphabet represents a particular sound (Shrier, 2013).

History of Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement has continually evolved over time. The purpose of parental development was designed to create a partnership that allowed for greater collaboration to increase student outcomes. By getting parents involved, educators can build an understanding and appreciativeness of the values and cultures of families; therefore, educators can be more effective in meeting students' needs. In the early to mid nineteenth century parental involvement looked quite different than it does now. The community, which included mainly the parents and the church, were in control of the educational system. They were the ones that hired the teachers, developed the curriculum, and decided on the skills that the children needed for their environment (Essays, 2018). In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, parental involvement and partnership with schools began to take a significant switch. Local schools began to be controlled by the state, county, and district (Essays, 2018). This is when the development of the educational system that is present today began. Teachers began making most of the educational decisions and parents were often left out of the conversations and were not nearly as involved as they had been previously.

As there was a significant shift in parental involvement, the educational system began to change as well. Student coursework began to increase and different content areas were beginning to be explored. According to Epstein (2001), parents were expected to take on a different role in their child's education. Parents were expected to prepare their children for school by providing values, responsibilities, and other commonly help work ethics (Esptein, 2001). Right after World War II, parental involvement became more of a focus in the educational system. Parental involvement right after World War II, included more of parent's participation in school-based activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, and fundraising events. Mothers

did most of parental involvement in schools because, at this time in history, many mothers stayed home with their children while the father was at work. In the 1960's, parental involvement became more focused on policies rather than just a belief. The main purpose of parental involvement was to focus primarily on students living in poverty. This resulted in many parent mandates and models of parental involvement that focused on movements for community control of education (Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012). In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which revolutionized the federal government's role in education. Up until this time, the responsibility of maintaining the schools fell primarily on local governments. This act allowed the federal government to allocate money directly to poor schools, communities, and children. This act did not have a direct effect on parental involvement in education; however, it paved the way to addressing the need for a partnership outside of the local government (Essays, 2018).

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act took effect. The purpose of this act was to hold schools and educators more accountable for providing high quality instruction as well as to build partnerships with families and communities. This education act was broken down into four key principles: high standards for all students, better trained teachers to teach high standards, flexibility to stimulate local initiative along with responsibility for results, and promoting partnerships among families, community, and schools (National Education Goals Panel, 1995). That same year, Bill Clinton also signed into effect the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This act consisted of eight national goals that were supposed to be implemented by the year 2000. Goal number eight stated, "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic

growth of children” (National Education Goals, 1995). This is when the development of parental involvement began to feel more like a partnership.

Parental involvement has come quite a long way in the past century and it has changed significantly; however, there is still a ways to go for every parent to truly feel that they are in a partnership with their child’s school. The continued lack of parental involvement in schools can be narrowed down to a few factors. Many educators have limited training on how to properly and appropriately involve parents in their child’s education. Poverty, language and cultural differences are also barriers to parental involvement; also not all educators and school leaders do not completely value the importance of parental involvement (Essays, 2018). There needs to be more training for educators on how to get parents fully involved because this will make the biggest impact.

Defining Parental Involvement in Education

There are many ideas that can be used to describe parental involvement, when it comes to education. If you ask five teachers what they believe parental involvement should be like in their school district, you will probably get about five completely different answers. How should we define parental involvement? Is it the amount of time the parent spends volunteering at the school, attending school functions, working with the child on educational activities at home, or communicating with the teacher on a regular basis? These are all important parts of parental involvement, but what do educators view as most important? According to a research study done by Asnat Dor and T. Brooke Rucker-Naidu, (2012) the majority of teachers interviewed defined parental involvement as volunteering either during or after the school day. However, volunteering is not always an option for some parents depending on work and family schedules. Many teachers also define parental involvement as supporting the learning process, which is

much more doable and accessible for all parents. Parents can support the learning process through involvement with homework, supporting their child with academic programs at home, and showing an interest in their child's learning (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). The definition of parental involvement really has changed over the past several decades. It used to mainly refer to parent participation in school-sponsored events that mainly took place at the school. As there has been more and more research that has come out to show an increasing importance with a child's home back ground and the connection it has to school success, the definition of parental involvement has begun to shift. Parental involvement is now focused more on the involvement of parents within the home setting, such as reading with their child or talking about school, and working with the child on academic skills in the home (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). Parents who believe their child's teacher is working with them in a partnership with parents to keep them informed and giving parents important information to help their child learn tended to be more involved in their child's school activities (Mullis et al., 2002).

There are many different ways to get parents involved in their child's education. According to Epstein (2004), there are six different types of involvement. The first type of involvement is parenting, which focuses on assisting families with parenting skills, family support, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Communicating is another type of involvement that focuses on creating a positive two-way communication relationship between home and school. Volunteering is also an important type of involving parents. This involves using recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to be able to involve families. It is also important to involve with their child's academic learning at home. Including families in homework, goal setting, and other curriculum related activities can allow for families to be more involved in child's education. Decision making and collaborating with

the community are both important parts of parental involvement (Epstein 2004). By using all these strategies, it can greatly improve parental involvement.

Parts of parental involvement that is important to literacy development in children

Parental involvement in education has become increasingly important and an educational issue that has been thoroughly researched. The big picture generally depicted from the research done by Epstein is that family involvement in schools leads to better attendance, higher scores on standardized tests, higher motivation to study, lower absenteeism, and improved behavior at home and at school (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). Early literacy skills are those skills that are important requisites to formal literacy learning, including expanding vocabulary and language, understanding concepts of print, phonemic awareness, demonstrating phonological awareness, knowledge of letters, and comprehending stories. These skills are primarily learned and cultivated between the ages of three and five, and these skills can be enhanced through parental involvement (Mullis, Mullis, Comille, Ritchson, & Sullender, 2002). Parents play a critical role in enhancing their child's literacy development through interactions with their child. The preschool age is an important part in child development, but it is especially important when it comes to literacy development. If a child is not gaining literacy skills and experiences at this stage, they have a greater risk of falling behind in reading in kindergarten and it is much harder for them to catch up to their peers. According to Karyl Milly, by promoting parental involvement and creating a community that involves families, children will ultimately benefit. This can be achieved through connections that the child brings from their home life and incorporating it into academics (Milly, 2010).

Francis Imperato (2009) is a reading specialist with a diverse school district in New Jersey. The school district, where she works has a wide variety of immigration families as well

as families that speak English as a second language. She began a program for parents to do with their child at home for ten to fifteen minutes four to six times a week. The program was intended for children entering kindergarten. Parents then kept logs of the activities and then time they spent doing the activities with their child. Her analysis suggested a correlation between participation and increased reading levels as measured by district assessments. Francis Imperato (2009) came to the conclusion that a simple at-home literacy program that features authentic and engaging reading activities that are easily understood, implemented, and administered show positive results in literacy learning. This was a pilot program that she only used with two of the kindergarten classes; however, she felt that it was so beneficial that she implemented it with all kindergarten classes the following year.

Writing skills are also a very important part of literacy development. Learning to write begins very early in a child's life and the home environment can provide many opportunities to develop emergent writing skills. There has been research done on the importance of parents working with their child on early writing skills that is similar to what Francis Imperato (2009) did, except she was more focused on reading part of literacy skills rather than the writing part. The guided writing strategies that the parents did with their child included the parent holding and leading the child's hand to write the letters and words, the parent writing a letter or word and encouraging the child to copy it, and the parent dictating the names and sounds of letters for the child to write their word (Neumann, 2009). It also important for parents of children with significant language delays to really work with their child. Research has shown that children with language delays are also significantly delayed in their writing skills. They types of joint writing activities described in this emergent writing case study coupled with the scaffold letter shaping strategy based on the use of tracing environmental print with fingers, whole body

movements and forming letter shapes in the air, use of directional language, and using lines to represent letters and words, may provide useful tools for parents to scaffold their child's alphabet letter shaping, emergent writing, alphabet knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and print motivation (Neumann, 2009). These are all important aspects of developing emergent writing skills in early childhood. These strategies can also be coming combined with the strategies that Francis Imperato suggested as well. This would allow the child to be working on all different aspects of literacy development.

Research has proven that parental involvement in children reading at home has increased literacy skills in young children. However, there are some methods that work better than others according to Rasinski, Padak, and Fawcett (2015). There are certain factors and principles that should be followed to ensure that the parental involvement is successful in developing the child's literacy skills. It is important to provide parents with methods of instruction that have been scientifically proven. It is also important for educators to provide parents with training and support, so that they feel comfortable working with their child on literacy skills. The more that the parents feel comfortable than the more likely it is that they will work with their child regularly at home. Activities that are provided for parents should be enjoyable and should be easy to follow and not take a lot of time. Most families have very busy schedules, so it is important that the activities take around ten to fifteen minutes and is fun for the child as well as the parents. This will ensure that parents stick with the program at home (Crosby et al. 2015). Based on these factors Padak and Rasinski (2015) developed a literacy program for parents to work with their children at home that they named Fast Start. In this program, children are asked to master a daily poem that is appropriate for young children. By using a poem or rhyme, this helps the child work on fluency, which is important because fluency is a big indicator of reading

achievement by grade three. Students who have greater fluency are more likely to have better reading comprehension; therefore, they are more likely to be a stronger reader and to be able to read at grade level. This program requires the child to sit next to the parent and listen to the parent read the poem several times, while paying attention to the words as the parent reads and models fluency for the child. Then the child and the parent read the poem together two to three times as the parent points to the words throughout the reading. Finally, the child will read the poem two to three times independently pointing to the words as he or she reads them. This program was then implemented into a kindergarten and first grade classroom at an elementary school. For each year of this study, it was discovered that children of parents that implemented the Fast Start program with them on a regular basis made gains in foundational literacy achievement, specifically in reading fluency, over children whose parents implemented fewer lessons or none at all (Crosby et. al. 2015). This program focused more on parents working with their child on fluency versus other literacy skills. It is not to say that other literacy skills are not important, but reading fluency is an indicator of reading success in other areas such as reading comprehension. It is predominately accepted by researchers, who have studies parental involvement, that parental involvement in their children's learning leads to better educational outcomes for those children (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). A parent that just reads daily to their child may not even fully realize all the benefits that reading aloud to their child offers, and it can greatly impact their literacy development. Parents can enhance the reading by engaging the child in phonemic awareness activities, rhymes, pointing to each word as they are reading, as well as rereading, all of these activities benefit their child in developing early literacy skills (Milly, 2010).

Family literacy programs are very important for preschool aged children. Swick discusses the benefits of family literacy programs during the preschool years. If students participate in these family literacy programs, they are more likely to be ready for school compared to students who did not participate in a program. Another benefit is that they are more likely to be successful throughout their school career because they are getting a head start on building their literacy skills. They are more likely to be at grade level at the start of kindergarten and continue to be on grade level in reading throughout their educational career (Swick, 2009).

Majority of research that has been done has shown a positive correlation between parental involvement and a positive increase in literacy skills and reading development. However, there has been a contradiction to the research. A study conducted by Hartas (2010) shows very little to no correlation between learning at home and a child's success in school. Hartas (2010) started his study by taking 19,000 children between the ages of nine and eleven months. The study followed these same students two other times in early childhood, when they were three years old and again when the students were five years old. The study had students from various economic and racial backgrounds. It was determined that the number of educational activities done with the students did not have a large impact on school success. However, the study did determine that if the child came from a wealthy home and the parents had a good educational background, they were more likely to be successful in school (Hartas, 2010).

Factors that can affect the level of parental involvement

Identifying factors that affect the level of parental involvement has been an important focus of research. The main factors that have been thoroughly researched with regards to educational success are students that come from low-income families as well as students that speak English as a second language. It is understandable that students from these situations

would have more academic struggles than other students. Does the amount of parental involvement play a role in this? According to Berthelsen and Walker (2008), parents from middle class have more contact with their children's schools, more knowledge of what their children are learning, engage in more educational activities with their children, and report higher expectations for their children than parents from lower economic homes (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). This means that students from lower income families are already at a greater disadvantage, when it comes to academic success. Parents have a lasting impact on their child's attitude and achievement when it comes to school. Parents can encourage their children's learning both in and out of school and can support their academic progress. This is why it is important to ensure that all parents have the same opportunities to get involved in their child's learning.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, about 15 million children in the United States live in families with income below the federal poverty threshold. However, research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses. Using this level, about 43% of children in the United States live in low-income families (National Center for Children in Poverty 2019). This is an alarming amount of children in this country that are struggling every day with getting their basic needs met. Therefore, it is no surprise that there are so many students in the United States that are not proficient in reading. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 65% of fourth graders were not proficient in reading in 2017, which represents an improvement of just three percent since 2009 (Hampton, 2019). Also according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, when children are reached with high quality learning experiences, they are 40% less likely to fall behind in school (Make Way for

Books 2019). As a country, it is important to determine what is the most effective way to be able to reach these students that are struggling everyday to have their basic needs met.

Not only are there many children that are living below the poverty level, but also there is a whole other group of children that does not get talked about too often. These are the children that are considered homeless. The McKinney Homeless Act of 1987 defines a homeless person as one who (a) lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or (b) lives in a shelter, institution, or a place not designed for, or ordinarily used, as a sleeping accommodation for human beings (MacGillivray, Ardell, & Curwen, 2010). Each night in the United States approximately 1.5 million children do not have a home to call their own (MacGillivray et al., 2010). How can we ensure that these students have the same opportunities as all other students to be successful? A misconception that surrounds these children is that their parents do not care or would rather not get involved, but this is just not true. These parents are struggling with just being able to provide the basic needs for their children, but these parents want what is best for their children. They just may need more support to be able to assist their children when it comes to education and working on those literacy skills. It may not be quite as easy to get parental involvement from these families, but it is still just as important, if not more important to have these parents involved. MacGillivray, Ardell, and Curwen put together some suggestions for educators to use, when dealing with children and families who are homeless to help their child still be successful in school. Most importantly, educators need to maintain high academic expectations for these students, while providing adequate accommodations to ensure all of their basic needs are being met. Families that live in homeless shelters are also very limited on time; therefore, it is important to provide parents with literacy activities that they can do with their child at home that take no more than ten minutes (MacGillivray et al., 2010).

Another factor that affects parental involvement in early literacy development is the amount of comfort that the parent when it comes to working with their child on academics. While a number of parents spend a great deal of time working with their young child on literacy skills, a large number of parents do not feel they have the capacity to teach their child literacy skills (Mullis et. al., 2002). While most parents are aware of the importance of doing literacy-based activities with their child, there are factors that can affect whether a parent or guardian implements these literacy-based activities. One major factor is the amount of time that the parent has. Many parents view extra academic activities as taking up a lot of time. Most households have two parents working and their children may be involved in many different activities, so time may be hard to come by for many households. This is why it is important that literacy activities that are provided to parents can be done with a short amount of time. There is also the belief that the beliefs and knowledge that the parents have about literacy can influence the child's home environment. This makes sense because if a parent genuinely enjoys reading than they are more likely to spend time reading to their child. According to Mullis (2002), a study examining a parent's perspectives of early literacy examined the difference between low-income families and middle-income families. It was discovered that very few children from low-income families participated in print related activities; however, children from middle-income families used literacy activities as a source of entertainment (Mullis et. al., 2002).

The educational and personal beliefs in relation to their child of the parent can also lead to positive outcomes for their child. There has been a link researched that determined that the higher education the mother has, the higher the expectations she has for her child. This then resulted in an increase in the child's academic achievement in both math and reading (Davis-Kean 2005). It is also important to understand that academic achievement of children has quite a

bit to do with the environment that the child is raised in. There is a stronger chance that child will be successful, if he or she is raised in a warm and nurturing environment with many learning experiences and opportunities provided. According to Davis-Keene (2005), mother's education and family income was important predictors of the physical environment and learning experiences in the home; however, mother's education alone was predictive of parental warmth (Davis-Keene, 2005). Davis-Keene (2005) performed a study to determine the link between parental education and the child's academic achievement indirectly through achievement beliefs and home behaviors. It was determined that the parents' years of education and family income influenced the types of literacy related materials in the home as well as a more positive relationship between the parents and the child (Davis-Keene, 2005).

There are many factors that can affect parental involvement in families. There has been much research done to demonstrate how critically important family involvement is early childhood. However, these factors need to be taken into consideration because some of them are outside the family's control. It is important that educators are properly trained to deal with these factors that might be seen as road blocks to incorporating families fully in their child's education. There has been the research done that tells school districts and educators the importance and the benefits of getting parents involved in their child's education at a young age; however, more needs to be done to deal with these factors that stand in the way of having 100 percent parental involvement across America. Some school districts may need more support than others depending on the clientele of the their students. It is important to note that every child has the right to have their parents involved in their education to help them be more successful. As educators, we need to do our best to set every child up for success throughout their educational career.

Analysis

Early literacy skills are so important for children to have in order to be successful in school. According to the National Institute of Early Literacy, the years from birth through age five are a critical time for children's development and learning. It is at this time that children learn the important skills needed for the development of later academic skills (National Institute for Literacy p. 4). This important development in a child's life happens before many students even start school. This is why it is so important to get parents and families involved in their child's learning at birth.

Parental involvement has become increasingly more important because of the understanding research has now provided us with on the importance of these skills. The definition of parental involvement has really changed over the past several decades. There is more of a focus on preparing parents to work with their child in the home rather than just being involved at school. Parents play a critical role in enhancing their child's literacy development from a very young age. According to the National Center for Families Learning (2019), parent and child interactions is the heart of a child's literacy development. Bringing children and parents together to work, play, read, and learn can lead to positive outcomes in language, literacy, emotional growth, and cognitive development (Jacobs, Cramer, Noles, & Lovett 2019). Parental involvement has then been shown to have positive impact on the learning of students and their academic success later on. There are many ways that parental involvement can benefit young children, but one focus on the research has been on having parents implement a simple reading program with their child to help enforce some early literacy skills. Francis Imperato (2009) came to the conclusion that a simple at-home literacy program that features authentic and

engaging reading activities that are easily understood, implemented, and administered show positive results in literacy learning (Imperato 2009).

It is predominately accepted by researchers, who have studies parental involvement, that parental involvement in their children's learning leads to better educational outcomes for those children (Berthelsen & Walker 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to have an understanding on how parental involvement can make the greatest impact in developing literacy skills in young children. Just by parents reading to their children can make an enormous difference in their child being prepared to start school. If parents are not involved from the beginning in helping their child develop the necessary literacy skills, this can have detrimental effects to the child's academic success. Research indicates that children who are struggling readers in first grade are 88% more likely to be struggling readers in fourth grade. When children struggle to read in fourth grade, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Make Way for Books 2019). By doing something as simple as reading to their child on a daily basis, a parent can help their child be more successful in the long run. It is hard to imagine that a child can fall so far behind so quickly, but once a child falls below grade level, it can be extremely difficult to catch that child up to his or her peers. This puts that child at risk on not graduating before that child even leaves first grade. This is why it is so important to continue to work with the child early on to ensure the child has the greatest chance for success.

Another focus of research has been on factors outside of a family's control that may already impact the amount of parental involvement that the family is capable of, as well as immediately putting the child behind his or her peers, when starting school. It was determined from research that parents from middle class have more contact with their children's schools, more knowledge of what their children are learning, engage in more educational activities with

their children, and report higher expectations for their children than parents from lower economic homes (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). Therefore, children from lower economic homes are at risk of starting school off behind their peers that are from middle class homes. There may be many reasons for this. Many parents from lower income homes might to work different hours that may not allow them to spend as much time with their child as they need to or would like to. Parents from lower income households usually do not have as much education as parents from middle class households. This can affect the view parent has on education as well as the comfort level the parent has with work with the child on literacy skills. It is not to say that they do not care about their or want their child to be successful, they just may not have a full understanding or the means to help their child the way parents from middle class families have. Lower income families may also not have as many resources to help their child, such as books at home or educational games and resources. According to Mullis (2002), a study examining a parent's perspectives of early literacy examined the difference between low-income families and middle-income families. It was discovered that very few children from low-income families participated in print related activities; however, children from middle-income families used literacy activities as a source of entertainment (Mullis et. al., 2002).

As an educator it is important to build up relationships with the parents and to make connections to ensure that every parent is comfortable reaching out and working with their child. The communication between the child's parent and the child's teacher can help a child be more successful. Parents from a middle class family are more likely to reach out to the teacher than a parent from a lower income family; therefore, as an educator it is important to continue to reach out to all families to talk to them about their child's education. Teachers make a great impact in a child's life, but the parents can make an even greater impact.

Application

According to the research that has been examined throughout this paper, there is definitely a connection between parental involvement and a child's success in school. When families are actively involved in their child's learning, children arrive at school ready to be engaged and succeed. Students of involved parents get better grades, score higher on standardized tests, have better attendance records, drop out less often, and have higher aspirations and more positive attitude toward work (Bronfenbrenner 2006). It is important to get parents involved early with their child's learning, especially when it comes to literacy skills. Parent involvement helps extend teaching and learning outside the classroom and creates a more positive experience for children, which then helps children perform better when they are in school (Spreeuwenberg 2010). By involving parents in their child's education early on, this can extend the experiences that a child has in the classroom to real-world activities that happen in the home. By making connections between school and home, the child has a greater opportunity for success. This brings up one of the most difficult challenges of an educator. How do we get parents more involved starting at a younger age?

It is important to get parents involved in their child's learning even before they step foot into a school. This can be increasingly more difficult especially if the parents do not already have school-aged children. This responsibility should not fall solely on schools; it needs to be a community effort. For example, the community can hold a literacy festival for parents in the community. This can be a place where families can bring their children to learn more about different literacy activities and the importance of them. It is important to make the festival engaging, so parents will want to attend and will take something out of it. Most importantly every child should leave the festival with a free book at his or her level. Many children do not

have access to many books at home, so this would provide be an opportunity to provide families with the tools need to work on and develop literacy skills at home.

As a child starts preschool, it becomes more important for teachers to build relationships with the parents and work on establishing connections to help parents feel comfortable working with their child at home on foundational literacy skills. An increase in family participation in preschool programs has been linked to greater motivation and stronger social and emotional skills (Bronfenbrenner 2006). Preschool teachers need to encourage parents to read to their child on a regular basis; however, there are other strategies that parents can do with their child during their reading time to help focus on building those foundational literacy skills to help their child be more prepared for kindergarten. These strategies could be sent out as a newsletter to all parents a few times throughout the school year. Here is a list of strategies that could be included in the newsletter: point to each word on the page as it is being read, read the title and have the child make a prediction, take picture walks, model fluency while reading by bringing energy and excitement to reading with the child, ask the child questions after reading every book, and connect reading and writing if possible (Burton 2013). These are just a few strategies that are very simple for parents to incorporate in their regular routine, but can have a great impact on the building those foundational literacy skills for the child.

As a first grade teacher, it is important that I continue to get parents involvement in their child's learning. First grade is a critical grade for young readers. This is when they truly start to use the literacy foundational skills that they should have to read fluently and accurately to support comprehension. This can be a difficult year for many students, especially those students that are already lacking some of the foundational skills. Therefore, it is important that I do what I can to help students be successful as well as getting parents involved to help their child with

literacy skills. To begin the year with, it is necessary to start off by building relationships with parents. The initial form of communication for each student should be a positive one, which will allow parents to be more comfortable with reaching out and getting involved in their child's education. There are several ways to promote literacy to parents and families. One great way to actively engage families, while also teaching them the benefit of early literacy skills, is by hosting a family literacy night. This can be a really great way to get to know families better, while focusing on different literacy skills that can be beneficial to their children and how to incorporate those skills at home on a regular basis. Through providing a time for parents to learn about their students' literacy education, ask questions, and develop at home involvement practices, parents and teachers become partners for student success (McGraw-Hill 2019).

As an educator though, the most important thing that I can do to help parents become more involved is to provide parents with the support and tools that they can use at home to promote literacy success. I need to ensure that activities that are provided for parents are enjoyable and easy to understand. It is also necessary for activities to only take about ten to fifteen minutes, since most families have very busy schedules. This will allow parents to be able to incorporate the program and activities in their home on a regular basis (Crosby et al., 2015). A strategy that can be used to share these activities could be a newsletter. A weekly newsletter can be sent out that would have literacy activities that the parents can do with their child. I would also try to tie the activities in with what we were focusing on in class that week. This would allow the students to make home and school connections, which can also promote academic success. Another great way to help parents feel more comfortable with working on literacy skills is by providing a demonstration that would allow parents to fully understand the specific literacy content and skills that are being done at school. Creating YouTube videos can help families

understand academic content standards and literacy-related benchmarks appropriate to their child's age. Research has shown that children show greater progress when parents learn specific methods for literacy improvement (McGraw-Hill, 2019).

These are just a few strategies that can be used to get parents involved in literacy development. It is also important to invite parents to their child's classroom on a regular basis. This allows the parent to really build a connection to their child's education. It also gives the parent and family a firm idea of what is going on with their child. By providing these opportunities to parents, they are more likely to work with their child at home, which will allow the child to be more successful. The most important thing to remember as an educator is that the success of the child is the most important, and the parents play a big role in whether their child is successful. It is up to us as educators to build on this partnership with parents to help the child be successful.

Conclusion

In today's education system, reading and literacy is the primary focus. The proficiency of students in reading at an early level is a big indicator on whether a student will be successful throughout the rest of their educational career. The foundational skills of print concepts, phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study can impact a student's ability to learn how to read at an appropriate level. There has been a massive amount of research done on different strategies to help students become better readers; however, a big focus currently is on the relationship between parental involvement and the success of the child in reading. It has been proven that there is a connection between the amount of parental involvement working on literacy skills with the child and the success of the child academically. There have also been many at home programs that have been implemented by parents that have been proven, through

research, to be successful. It is important that these programs are engaging and focused on specific literacy skills. Foundational literacy skills are important for children to acquire even before they enter kindergarten, otherwise they may already be behind their peers. Knowing the importance of parental involvement early on in a child's life and the affect it has on literacy development, it is important for educators of all age groups to apply this research by promoting parental involvement frequently by using different communication strategies. Getting parents involved is one of the greatest assets educators can use to ensure that all students are successful, so it is important that all educators are trained on how to use the greatest asset that they have available to them.

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